

INVESTIGATING THE IMPACT OF ONBOARD AND ONSHORE CRUISE  
ATTRIBUTES TO CONSUMER PURCHASE OF CRUISE HOLIDAYS IN LAKE SAIMAA

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International Business

Bachelor's Thesis

Supervisor: Jaywant Singh

Date of Approval: 9 April 2020

Aalto University

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### **Objectives**

The main objectives of this study were to investigate the effect of onboard and onshore attributes of river cruises to purchase intention of a cruise holiday. In addition, the study explored whether past experience with cruises or identifying oneself as ecotourist affects the importance attached to different cruise attributes.

### **Summary**

This thesis focuses on finding out which cruise attributes are the most important ones when potential consumers are considering purchasing a cruise holiday. A conceptual framework was developed to explore the effects of cruise attributes to purchase decision and then operationalized with an online survey.

### **Conclusions**

In the context of river cruises, consumers value onshore attributes to be more important than in the context of ocean cruises. Furthermore, the valuation of attribute importance is positively correlated to purchase intention. The findings also show that some consumer characteristics, such as past experience with cruises and identifying oneself as ecotourist, affect the importance attached to certain cruise attributes. Overall, the results show the necessity of segmenting markets and provides cruise marketers with information on what attributes to highlight in their marketing.

**Key words:** cruise tourism, decision making, product attributes,

**Language:** English

**Grade:**

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ABSTRACT

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## 1. INTRODUCTION

Lake Saimaa is the fourth largest freshwater lake in Europe and the largest one in Finland, connecting the whole eastern Finland. It is a network of rivers and lakes having 14 000 islands on it making it a unique destination to visit with its one-of-a-kind lake labyrinth, beautiful scenery and the purest nature (Pitkänen & Vepsäläinen, 2006; [www.lakesaimaa.fi](http://www.lakesaimaa.fi), 2017). Saimaa region has been attracting tourists ever since the late 19th century with its steamboat traffic and beautiful landscapes, thus, having a long history in the field of tourism (Pitkänen & Vepsäläinen, 2006). Lake Saimaa has many exceptional qualities attracting foreign tourists such as extremely clean air, a lot of untouched nature, magical nightless nights, a lake full of fresh fish and one of the rarest seals, Saimaa ringed seal, living there just to mention a few. In addition to those nature-based qualities, Lake Saimaa offers other manmade attractions like St. Olof's castle, Savonlinna's opera festival, 6000-year-old rock paintings and old Valamo monastery ([www.lakesaimaa.fi](http://www.lakesaimaa.fi), 2017). Because of the region's unique qualities, it could be marketed as an ecotourism destination.

In 2014, Lake Saimaa was recognized to be one of the most spectacular lakes around the world by the Wall Street Journal (Styles, 2014). Even so, little has been done ever since trying to utilize the beautiful lake to its fullest even though the potential is enormous. Currently, there are a lot of sightseeing cruises offered in the region, but nothing that would last for a couple of days or more ([www.visitsaimaa.fi](http://www.visitsaimaa.fi), n.d.). According to Savonlinna Region Federation of Municipalities (2011), the extensive lacustrine system of Lake Saimaa offers a lot of potential for a series of week-long river cruises with varying programs.

Saimaa as a cruise destination brings some limitations to the cruises that can be offered. The Saimaa Canal, the gateway to the lacustrine system, has very limited dimensions. The maximum size of any ship would be limited to 82m in length (Savonlinna Region Federation of Municipalities, 2011). Thus, the cruise ships need to be relatively small. They do not have the room to offer all the extra amenities and recreational facilities (e.g.

night clubs, shopping opportunities or pools) onboard that many of the huge cruise ships in the ocean can offer. River cruises need to focus on gaining comparative advantages otherwise, for example from the surrounding exceptional environment.

## **1.1. Background**

The cruise industry is one of the fastest-growing sub-sectors of tourism, steadily growing around a 7% rate per year (Rodrigue, 2020). Cruise Lines International Association (CLIA) (2019) estimates that in the year 2020, the total number of cruise passengers worldwide will reach 32 million. In 2018, Northern Europe was the fourth most popular destination accounting for around 6% of all the cruise holidays while the Caribbean was clearly the most popular destination, accounting for around 40% of all the cruise holidays (CLIA, 2018). However, with river cruises, Europe has the largest share of the market (Bosnic & Gasic, 2019).

At the same time, sustainability and sustainable tourism are growing trends all over the world. In a base report conducted by the World Tourism Organization (2019), they conclude that 100% of their member nations make at least a reference to the need for developing tourism sustainably. This same trend is also followed by the cruise industry itself, CLIA (2019) mentioning environmental sustainability as a top trend for the cruise industry in 2020.

Furthermore, Bell & Petursson (2009) points out how people in the modern and urbanized world are starting to feel concerned over their hectic lifestyle and are starting to value more and more nature and possible benefits from outdoor recreation. Saimaa with all its unique features and environment makes it a perfect destination for anyone looking to have a holiday close to nature.

## **1.2. Research problem**

In recent years, the demand for international river cruises has increased significantly (Bosnic & Gasic, 2019) while at the same time Lake Saimaa and its current sightseeing cruises have gained increasing popularity (Tanskanen, 2019). The increasing demand for cruises in the Saimaa region has encouraged local cruise operators to expand their operations and currently, there are at least three luxury river cruise ships under planning (Tanskanen, 2019).

At the time being, there are no river cruises offered in the Saimaa region even though the current trends in the cruise industry offer a lot of possibilities. Thus, there is very little information available for local cruise operators of what are the most appealing and important cruise attributes for potential customers. There is a need for a study investigating what are the most important attributes of a river cruise in the Saimaa region affecting the decision to which cruise to choose.

## **1.3. Research questions**

From now on, when attributes specific to cruise ships are discussed they are referred to as onboard attributes. When attributes specific to ports of call are discussed they are referred to as onshore attributes.

RQ1: What is the impact of onboard attributes on consumer purchase of cruise holidays?

RQ2: What is the impact of onshore activities on consumer purchase of cruise holidays?

## **1.4. Research objectives**

RO1: To develop an understanding of what are the most appealing attributes for a potential consumer when they are deciding which cruise to choose.



## **2. LITERATURE REVIEW AND HYPOTHESES DEVELOPMENT**

### **2.1. Introduction**

The modern cruise industry has its roots in the late 1960s and it has been growing steadily at around 7% rate per year ever since (Rodrigue, 2020). Even though the industry itself has been there for over 50 years steadily growing, the research on the subject has been quite non-existent until the 2000s (Papathanassis & Beckmann, 2011). Despite the constantly increasing number of publications relating to cruise tourism, Papathanassis & Beckmann (2011) pointed out how fragmented the research is in the field of the cruise industry. Most of the past research has been focusing on ocean cruises. Smaller segments of cruise tourism, such as river cruises, have not gained attention in academic research. Furthermore, many of the consumer research studies focusing on the cruise industry examine cruise passengers' post-purchase behavior instead of decision-making. Hence, a lot of research gaps remain in the field.

The purpose of this literature review is to critically review the literature relating to cruise attributes while at the same time develop hypotheses for further testing. There are three parts: firstly, consumer decision-making in cruising is reviewed. Secondly, there is a discussion about cruise attributes and how they interact together. Lastly, the possible effects of past cruising experience and being ecotourist to perceived attribute importance are discussed.

### **2.2. Consumer decision-making in cruising**

Before making a purchase decision, consumers go through a decision-making process which includes steps of need recognition, information search, evaluation of alternatives,

the actual purchase decision and finally post-purchase evaluation. The evaluation of a product generally predicts purchase intention (Kotler et al., 2017).

In past literature, tourists' decision-making processes have been widely studied. Crompton (1992) proposed a three-stage model, structure of choice sets that tourists face when trying to decide their vacation destination. In Crompton's (1992) model all destinations that tourists are aware of are funneled down to reach the final selected destination. In the follow-up study, Crompton and Ankomah (1993) concluded that this model would only apply in case the tourist goes through high involvement non-routinized decision-process.

Petrack et al. (2007) conducted an empirical study trying to support Crompton's (1992) model in the context of cruising. They suggested that the decision process for cruise passengers is more complex than what the model by Crompton (1992) proposes because, in addition to deciding whether to go for a trip and where to go, cruise passengers also need to decide which cruise line and which ship from that line to take. In their study, Petrick et al. (2007) found out that there are two groups of decision-makers, the ones that go through a complex decision making and the ones that are brand loyal and know immediately which cruise to choose. The latter having previous experiences in sailing with the same cruise line before. This finding supports the conclusion by Crompton and Ankomah (1993) that the model works only if the consumers go through the complex decision-making process. Another important finding from the study (Petrick et al. 2007) was that for the group that went through a complex decision-making process, the most important affecting factor tended to be the perception of value. In addition to that, social influence (e.g. friends, family or travel agency) did have an impact on the decision, especially in the later stages of the decision process when one was deciding which cruise line to choose.

Purchase intention is considered to be an important indicator of actual purchase because it is formed under the assumption spending money (Chang & Wildt, 1994) According to information integration theory developed by Anderson (1971), when evaluating

alternatives people seek information from at least two different sources, integrate them and finally form a quantitative value. Each piece of information has two dimensions, weight and value. Weight is the perceived importance of information while the value is the evaluation of the information. In the context of cruise passengers' decision-making, it would mean that purchase intention is the quantitative value that is determined jointly by the perceived performance of cruise attributes and the importance attached to them. While it might be impossible for a tour operator to affect the perceived importance of attribute, they can affect the performance of the attributes deemed to be most important. That is why the operators must understand what are the most important product attributes affecting the purchase intention of a consumer.

Past research has revealed many factors affecting the decision to cruise including, but not limited to, demographics, trip attributes (De la Viña & Ford 2001), motivations (Jones 2011), and attributes of a cruise ship (Xie et al. 2012). When motivations to travel are measured, a push-pull framework is often used. In the travel context push factors are the internal motives that push us to travel, such as seeking for relaxation, while the pull factors are the destination attributes that pull the tourist to visit that specific place such as experiencing a new exotic place (Kim et al. 2003; Uysal et al. 2008). Both the effect of push and pull factors are important to understand for marketing purposes, but the push factors are out of the scope of this thesis.

### **2.3. Cruises and ports acting as co-destination**

A tourist destination is an area to visit and stay where the tourists travel for experience (Kotler et al, 2017). An increase in cruise tourism has allowed the huge cruise lines to develop their cruises as resort-style destinations which in turn has led them to market their cruises as primary destinations, as competitors of traditional land-based destinations. "Destinational cruises", the ones in which the ports of call are central for the consumer experience, are nowadays considered to be a more of a "niche" market (Wood, 2000; Whyte et al. 2018). Weaver (2005) described this phenomenon as 'destinization'. Some

cruise passengers choose to spend their whole vacation onboard, and not visiting the ports of call at all when the ship is docked (Whyte et al., 2018, Vianelli & Valta, 2019).

Despite the current trend of big cruise lines marketing themselves as primary destinations, there is some ongoing debate in academic literature whether the ports of call are in fact as meaningless as assumed (Whyte et al, 2018; Vianelli & Valta, 2019). Many of the studies investigating the cruise attributes treat the ports of call as one of the subcategories of the cruise itself (Teye & Paris, 2010; Jones 2011; Chen et al., 2016), some studied not including them at all (Chua et al, 2016). Besides, past research in the field of cruise tourism has mainly focused on studying ocean cruises and river cruises are given very little attention. As noted by Jones et al. (2016) states, river cruises do not have the same possibility to offer a wide range of leisure and entertainment facilities available as do the ocean cruises have. Hence, in most cases, more weight is placed on destinations than on the ships themselves.

To describe this unique nature of cruise tourism, Whyte et al. (2018) introduced the term 'co-destination' emphasizing that the cruise ship itself and the ports of call jointly create the destination for the tourists.

#### **2.4. The relative importance between onboard and onshore attributes**

Whyte et al. (2018: 472) define destination attributes to be "the tangible and intangible core attributes and attractors of a destination that influence travelers to choose one destination over another." In the context of cruising, the concept of co-destination forces the attributes of the ship itself and the attributes of the ports of call to be considered separately. To investigate relative importance between onboard and onshore attributes, Whyte et al. (2018) developed a cruise destination attribute scale treating onshore attributes as equally important as onboard attributes. Past literature has measured cruise attributes with many different scales bringing some challenges in analyzing the previous

results. Because the measurement items and constructs used vary considerably, most previous results are not directly comparable.

The objective of Whyte et al. (2018) was first to develop the scale itself but secondly use it to examine whether the onboard or the onshore attributes are more important in cruise tourists' decision-making process. In their scale, Whyte et al. (2018) used seven-point Likert scales. The results showed that the onboard attributes were significantly more important compared to the onshore attributes receiving average scores of 5.69 out of 7 and 5.37 out of 7 respectively. The results are in alignment with previous studies. For example, Chen et al. (2016) claimed that attributes of the ports are not among the most important attributes of a cruise while Thyne et al. (2015) concluded that many of the cruise passengers do not seek information about the ports of call earlier than a day before departing, implying that the passengers do not care about the ports. These results are in accordance with the behavior of cruise lines marketing themselves as primary destinations.

On the other hand, Teye & Paris (2016) suggested that the cruise passengers would use cruises as "sampling experience" of possible future vacations. Cruises allow them to see many different ports within a short period of time and evaluate whether the ports of call are worth visiting for a longer period. Although Teye & Paris (2016) are not implying that the cruise ports would affect the decision of which cruise to choose, they are suggesting that the ports of call are not completely meaningless.

Vianelli and Valta (2019) offered a new perspective when they segmented cruise passengers based on their preferences regarding cruise attributes. They used "social life on board", "cruise features" and "tourism destination" as the attribute groups and were able to form six different segments. Instead of trying to determine whether onboard or onshore attributes are more important, they simply stated that there are the "ship lovers" and then the "tourism destination lovers".

Although the literature reviewed does not directly address river cruises, it seems to be quite convergent in suggesting that onboard attributes are more pivotal than onshore attributes in the minds of consumers. Therefore, this thesis hypothesizes:

Hypothesis 1 (H1): The onboard attributes are rated to be more important than the onshore attributes.

Hypothesis 2 (H2): The onboard attributes have a higher impact on purchase intention.

#### **2.4.1. Onboard attributes**

The onboard attributes refer to the attributes specific for the cruise ship that encourages the tourist to choose that cruise line or cruise ship over another. The factor groups identified by Whyte et al. (2018) are 1) onboard environment, 2) onboard recreation and 3) onboard social interactions. These groups not only include all the core attributes such as cabin and food, but also features producing hedonic value such as having a relaxing/stress-relieving atmosphere. The planned river cruises offered in the Saimaa region would be luxurious in style which is taken into account in the following discussion.

As mentioned in the introduction, sustainability is a constantly increasing trend. Yet, Whyte et al. (2018) did not include environmental aspects in their attribute scale. Today's cruisers are not willing to just settle for all the amenities and services provided by modern technology, they also want the cruise industry to know that they are more aware of environmental issues and demand changes to the non-sustainable practices (Jones 2010, cited in Adams et al., 2017: 32). The rapid growth of the cruise industry has led to increasing concerns about environmental issues, for example, to discussions of what is the carbon footprint left behind by the cruise passengers (Klein, 2011). Therefore, also ship's eco-friendliness will be added as a fourth factor group under onboard attributes.

*Onboard environment.* Whyte et al. (2018) refer the onboard environment as to the general atmosphere created on the ship. It includes both features producing functional

value and features producing hedonic value. For example, a comfortable environment, safety, cleanliness, high quality, service, accommodation, personal space, and uncrowdedness are included. Most other studies have not delineated onboard environment so widely, and have only included core functional qualities such as food, accommodation, restaurants and room service (Xie et al., 2012; Chen et al., 2016). These studies consistently pointed out how these core functional attributes are valued to be the most important ones out of onboard attributes. In regards to features producing hedonic value, Jones (2011) found out that comfort and motives such as relaxation and calmness consistently ranked high in influencing one's decision to cruise. Yang & Mattila (2016) received similar results when they studied why people buy luxury services through luxury restaurants. They found out that the importance of hedonic value, the pure enjoyment that consumers received from the product, was the biggest determinant in the customer's purchase intention. The second important features were aspects with functional value such as aesthetics and quality. Griffin et al. (2008) studied how business travelers discriminate between mid-priced and luxury hotels, and the key determinants between the two types of hotels were additional amenities such as bellman and concierge services and gourmet restaurant. Hence, consumers expect to receive better service in luxury hotels which could imply that consumers also expect to receive exceptional service in luxury cruise. All these results are in align suggesting that the onboard environment is the most important group out of onboard attributes.

*Onboard recreation.* Recreation refers to a way of enjoying yourself during one's discretionary time. In cruise destination attribute scale by Whyte et al. (2018), onboard recreation factor group involves health, fitness, entertainment, and general exciting atmosphere, while other studies (Xie et al., 2012; Chen et al., 2016) have separated these factors as to their individual groups with more specific measurement items. For example, Xie et al. (2012) had a spa, fitness center, and beauty salon as three separate items under the health and fitness factor group while Whyte et al. (2018) united all these under one item, the importance of having onboard health & fitness facilities. Findings from Xie et al. (2012), Chen et al. (2016) and Whyte et al. (2018) show that all these recreational and supplementary services are deemed to be relatively unimportant compared to the core

services such as cabin or food. Additionally, Chua et al. (2016) conclude that most of the rated entertainment, sports, health and fitness to be a low priority for them when compared to other attributes.

*Onboard social interactions.* According to Whyte et al. (2018), social interactions include getting to know new people with similar interests, socializing, and having friendly passengers with diverse backgrounds. The construct tries to measure how important possible encounters with other people are. Previous studies have not included onboard social interactions as an attribute (pull factor) but as a motivation (push factor) instead (Chen et al., 2016; Teye & Paris, 2011; Jones 2011), and therefore it is impossible to directly apply the findings from previous literature. However, Jones (2011) and Whyte (2017) found evidence that social motives are only moderate influencers when people are making the choice to cruise. On the other hand, Chua et al. (2016) state that cruise passengers can have very diverse opinions about onboard social interactions. Some passengers might even feel them as negative factors due to the noise and possible disruptive behavior if one is only looking for a relaxing cruise holiday, while the other parties on the cruise are very important.

*Ship's eco-friendliness.* Various studies have indicated that consumers are willing to make trade-offs, such as paying a premium, in order to purchase more sustainable products (Young et al., 2010; Kazeminia et al., 2016). Nevertheless, Miller et al. (2010) found evidence that even though consumers would support pro-environmental behavior in their daily life, as tourists they were not necessarily aware of the direct impact of tourism on the environment and thus did not make environmentally responsible decisions. Additionally, Miller et al. (2010) discovered that many consumers felt that since they had already paid for all the services, they were entitled to use all the resources and energy available. Findings from a study conducted by Adams et al. (2017) support these statements. They compared the relative importance of corporate social and environmental responsibility (CSER) with other cruise attributes, and they concluded that consumers do prefer companies with CSER practices, but when the actual selection process of cruises was going on consumers placed less importance to CSER. Thus, these findings imply that



even though eco-friendliness, in general, is deemed to be an important factor, it is not necessarily an important factor when deciding which cruise to choose. Some operators in the field have started to certify their products as a means to distinguish legitimate ecotourism products from 'greenwashed' products (Haaland & Aas 2010; Medina 2005). Generally, a certificate is considered to be a mark of a high-quality product that meets the specific standards (Haaland & Aas 2010) thus making it easier for the consumer to trust the product. That is why also eco-certificate should be considered as one of the attributes affecting the consumers' decision-making.

Past literature seems to be quite convergent in suggesting that the onboard environment of a cruise ship is the most important attribute group when the tourist is deciding which cruise to take. Both onboard social interactions and onboard recreation seem to have a moderate effect in deciding which cruise to take. However, even though it is assumed that the ship's eco-friendliness is an important factor for the consumers, it might not be important in their decision-making regarding cruise holidays.

#### **2.4.2. Onshore attributes**

The onshore attributes refer to the traditional land-based destination attributes. They can be either natural or human-made. In the scale development process, Whyte et al. (2018) identified five factor groups for the onshore attributes them being 1) onshore activities, 2) learning and exploration, 3) visual surroundings, 4) safety and comfort, and 5) destination development. In the following discussion, it is taken into consideration that the study is conducted in an ecotourism destination. There is very little research that would look into onshore attributes in the context of cruises, thus most of the discussions are derived from studies about destination attractiveness.

*Onshore activities.* In the cruise destination attribute scale, onshore activities include all the entertainment and activities offered in the ports of call (Whyte et al, 2018). When destination attractiveness is studied, it seems that sports and recreational activities are

constantly among one of the least important attributes (Meng et al. 2008; Krešić & Prebežac, 2011; Diaz-Christiansen et al, 2016). Yet, it does not mean that onshore activities would be unimportant while cruising (Johnson, 2006; London, 2012), it simply means that they do not have that great impact on the destination's perceived attractiveness.

*Learning and exploration.* According to Whyte et al. (2018), factor group of learning and exploration includes, for example, local cultures, learning new things, historical sites and attractions, new and varied destinations. Andriotis & Agiomirgianakis (2010) studied cruise passengers' motivational attributes for undertaking a cruise in Greece and their findings imply that the most important motivator is the desire to explore the history, culture, and nature of the destination. However, they also point out that this is highly destination dependent based on findings by Shoewalter (1995) who concluded that one of the core elements of cruises in the Caribbean was the beach experience. Supporting findings are done by Teye & Paris (2010) who discovered that opportunity to explore multiple destinations and cultures is a strong motivator to go on a cruise.

*Visual surroundings.* Visual surroundings include beautiful scenery and natural features such as rivers or forests (Whyte et al., 2018). Hu & Ritchie (1993), Van Heerden et al. (2009), and Krešić & Prebežac (2011) all have found evidence that the natural environment was a single most important component of determining destination's attractiveness, especially among people who are looking for a recreational vacation experience. However, the findings need to be considered critically. Even though visual surroundings was deemed to be an important factor in determining the attractiveness of a destination, it does not mean that it would also be the main driving factor in decision-making, especially in the context of cruises.

*Safety and comfort.* In the cruise destination attribute scale, Whyte et al. (2018) included signage, cleanliness, and feeling of safeness under safety and comfort. Huang & Sarigöllü (2008) and Andriotis & Agiomirgianakis (2010) both found evidence that safety is one of the most important determinants of satisfaction and an important attribute when choosing

a cruise destination. Supporting findings are done by Brida et al. (2012) claiming that safety is a crucial aspect in determining destination loyalty which further highlights the importance of the attribute. Furthermore, Ozturk & Qu (2008) and Andriotis & Agiomirgianakis (2010) state that hygiene/cleanliness is a relatively important factor in determining the destination's image.

*Destination development.* Whyte et al. (2018) define destination development as having well-known places and attractions and general development (e.g. infrastructure, government, economy). Huang & Sarigöllü (2008) found out that the infrastructure of destination was perceived to be the least important factor and most other studies do not consider infrastructure at all as an attribute. Therefore, due to the lack of importance found from other studies destination development as a factor group was left out.

All in all, based on past literature visual surroundings and safety and comfort are deemed to be the most important attribute groups. Learning and exploration as a category seems to be dividing opinions, because of the different motivations to cruise the consumers have. Onshore activities do not appear to have a significant importance intention, but it does not mean that it would be a meaningless factor. Because of the lack of supporting literature regarding destination development, it is left out as a category from further analysis.

## **2.5. Cruisers versus potential Cruisers**

Turning potential visitors to actual visitors is a continuous challenge faced by the whole tourism industry. In the past literature, it is widely accepted that visitors and non-visitors have different perceptions of destinations and activities offered, and what attributes they consider to be important in their decision-making (Hu & Ritchie, 1993; Baloglu, 1998; Fluker & Turner, 2000; Xie et al., 2012; Stylidis & Cherifi, 2018). Although tourism literature has studied the topic quite extensively, there are still gaps in the research. There are no studies investigating how past cruising experience affects the relative perceived importance of onboard and onshore cruise attributes and therefore the effect of past

cruising experience is taken into account in this thesis. From now on, people who have cruised before are referred as to cruisers, and people who do not have previous cruising experience are referred as to potential cruisers.

Generally, increased product familiarity leads to increased product expertise (Alba & Hutchinson, 1987; Hutchinson & Eisenstein, 2008). Product familiarity refers to “the number of product related experiences that have been accumulated by the consumer” while product expertise refers to “the ability to perform product-related tasks successfully” (Alba & Hutchinson, 1987: 411). In this occasion, it would mean that being more familiar with cruise attributes would lead to more efficient decision-making process in deciding which cruise to choose. However, Hutchinson & Eisenstein (2008) also acknowledge that there are some pitfalls in the theory because not all experience leads to expertise and sometimes overconfidence in one’s knowledge can lead to biased judgements.

Familiarity can be acquired, for example, through first-hand experience, information search, or word-of-mouth (Hutchinson & Eisenstein, 2008). Because cruisers have already acquired some first-hand experience of cruising, unlike potential cruisers, these two groups differ in their familiarity with the product category. More specifically, they presumably vary on each other in respect of their knowledge about cruise attributes. Park (1976) and Coupey et al. (1998) have demonstrated with physical goods how consumers’ judgment of product attributes with unfamiliar products tend to be more equally weighted than with familiar products. With familiar products, consumers know already which attributes are the most important them and hence weight the most important attributes more heavily.

Like discussed before, according to information attribute theory purchase intention can be displayed as a function of perceived importance of attributes and the evaluation of those attributes (Anderson, 1971). In other words, attaching different amounts of importance to the attributes affects the purchase intention of consumers. In case the potential cruisers and cruisers value the importance of attributes differently, it can be assumed that they also have different purchase intention. Supporting findings were done by De la Viña &

Ford (2012) who concluded that in case consumers had cruised at least once before, it had a significant effect on the consumers intention to cruise again.

Xie et al. (2012) found out that there were some significant differences between judgements of importance of different onboard attributes between cruisers and potential cruisers. Potential cruisers attached more importance to attributes deemed to be relatively insignificant for a cruiser such as “sports” or “health”. On the other hand, the attributes that were ranked to be important by cruisers, were also ranked to be important by potential cruisers. These findings support the equal weighting scheme proposed by Park (1976) and Coupey et al. (1998) discussed earlier.

Hu & Ritchie (1993) studied how visitors and non-visitors evaluate the impact of destination attributes to the attractiveness of a tourist destination. Their findings demonstrate that there are significant differences in attributions between the two groups. Further support can be found from a more recent study by Stylidis & Cherifi (2018) who studied the perceptions that visitors and non-visitors hold about London. They found out that non-visitors had very vague, simplistic and sometimes inaccurate perceptions compared to previous visitors which could imply that persons with no previous experience about the destination might hold very different points of views.

Previous studies about product familiarity and about visitors and non-visitors different perceptions about destinations do imply that past experience with destination, in this case with cruises, would affect the relative perceived importance of different attributes. Therefore, this thesis hypothesizes:

Hypothesis 3 (H3): Past experience with cruises affect the perceived importance of certain attributes.

## **2.6. Ecotourists versus non-ecotourists**

Because this study is conducted in an ecotourism destination, it was considered to be important to deepen understanding of ecotourism and ecotourists.

Ecotourism is not a new concept and the term “ecotourism” has been around since the 1980s (Orams, 1995). Nevertheless, even today it is still lacking a widely accepted definition, some scholars even referring to it as “buzzword” used in marketing to take advantage of travelers longing for exotic destinations (Sirakaya et al., 1999). Some other scholars have argued that it might not be even necessary to establish a clear definition of ecotourism unless the term is used in formal contexts such as legal or administrative papers (Buckley, 1994). On the other hand, this presents problem when trying to operationalize this particular construct. Plenty of different elements could be placed under ecotourism, but the main principle differentiating ecotourism from general tourism is its closeness to nature and the positive contribution to preserving the environment (Buckley, 2009). Other generally well accepted principles of ecotourism are involving local communities and cultures and that the educational aspect of both cultural and natural heritage are present (Ceballos-Lascuráin, 2002).

In the past literature, ecotourists have been defined in many various ways. Hvenegaard (2002) points out how some studies have considered tourist as an ecotourist if they enter into particular site or if they engage in particular activity, some studies use travel motivations as a criteria and some studies use the values the tourists hold as a criteria. More recently however, Deng and Li (2015) have suggested that tourists’ own judgement and self-identification as an ecotourist could be more meaningful and practical way of determining and measuring who is an ecotourist and who is not.

Cleaver & and Muller (2002) and Wight (2001) suggest that ecotourists exist in spectrums having varying degrees of interest in different aspects of ecotourism. One of the so called spectrums was proposed by Laarman and Durst (1987), when they suggested that there is soft ecotourism and hard ecotourism including the dimensions of level of challenge and

degree of interest. For example, soft tourism would include a guided tour in natural park while hard ecotourism would include studying bears in their natural habitat. This proposition is supported by later findings, in which “harder” ecotourists have longer trips in small groups, they are more physically active, and they do not expect as many services compared to “softer” ecotourists (Weaver & Lawton 2002). In addition, soft ecotourism is usually practiced as a part of multi-purpose travel experience in well-serviced and accessible areas (Weaver 2001). Ecotourism alongside of river cruise would be considered as soft ecotourism.

So far the academic research about ecotourists’ motivations to travel and about their preferences regarding destination attributes is practically nonexistent. However, there are some studies taking a conceptual approach to measuring destination attributes. Hu & Ritchie (1993) and Tam (2012) have studied the importance of destination attributes in the context of recreational vacation experience and in the context of educational vacation experience. Educational vacation experience was defined to be mainly driven by interest in learning and experiencing destination’s local culture (Hu & Ritchie, 1993) which corresponds to one of the principles of ecotourism (Ceballos-Lascuráin, 2002). Both studies show that the relative rated importance of attributes varied significantly in different contexts. For example, Hu & Ritchie (1993) found out that people looking for educational vacation rated uniqueness of local people’s life to be the most important and historical attractions to be the second most important, while those were rated to be 7<sup>th</sup> and 10<sup>th</sup> most important respectively by people looking for recreational vacation. On the other hand recreational group rated the weather to be the most important attribute while it was rated to be 12<sup>th</sup> most important by the educational group.

Although these findings are not directly relating to perceived attribute importance by ecotourists, they imply that the context and type of vacation affect the importance attached. Therefore, this thesis hypothesizes:

Hypothesis 4 (H4): Being ecotourist affects the perceived importance of certain attributes.

## **2.7. Conclusion**

Regardless of the constantly increasing attention to cruise tourism in academic literature, most of the consumer research in the area has been focusing on studying the consumers' post-purchase evaluations while the consumer decision-making has remained relatively understudied. This literature review tried to explain and explore what are the possible cruise attributes affecting the consumers' decision-making in cruising. In addition, it provided some insights on how previous cruising experience and being an ecotourist could affect the perceived importance of some attributes.



### **3. METHODOLOGY**

This chapter discusses the methodology used in the research. First, the hypotheses and the conceptual framework is presented. Second, the purpose of the study and the type of investigation are discussed. Third, the scale measurement and questionnaire design are introduced. Fourth, the questionnaire design is reviewed. Finally, the sample and sampling method used are discussed.

#### **3.1. Research hypotheses**

As the literature review suggests, there are some gaps in the research. Based on these gaps four hypotheses were drawn.

H1: The onboard attributes are rated to be more important than the onshore attributes.

H2: The onboard attributes have higher impact on purchase intention.

H3: Past experience with cruises affect the perceived importance of certain attributes.

H4: Being ecotourist affects the perceived importance of certain attributes.

#### **3.2. Conceptual Framework**

The following conceptual framework (Figure 1) is derived from cruise destination attribute scale by Whyte et al. (2018). Two modifications were done to the original scale based on literature review. Firstly, destination development was eliminated from the onshore attributes and secondly, ship's eco-friendliness was added to onboard attributes.

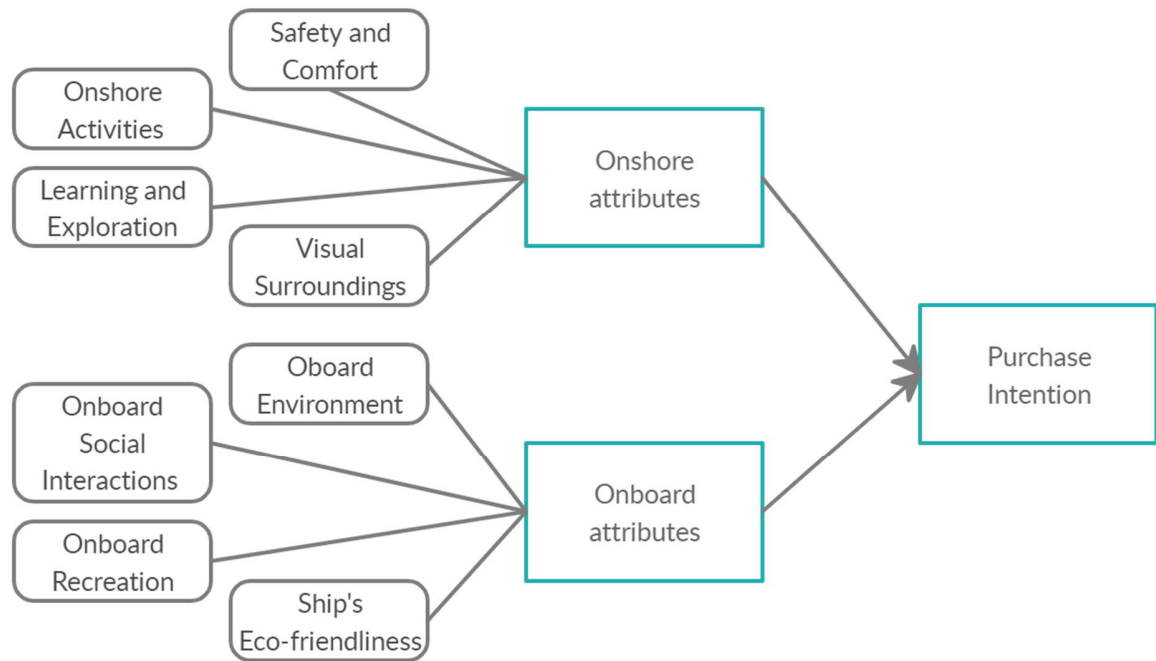


Figure 1: Conceptual framework

### 3.3. Type of investigation

This study is descriptive in nature since the purpose of it is to obtain data describing consumers perceived attribute importances. Since this study aims to define the relationship between the independent variable, perceived importance of attributes, and the dependent variable, purchase intention, quantitative approach is chosen. Quantitative approach allows to gather vast amounts of data and removes the researcher bias from data analysis (Sekaran & Bougie, 2016).

Survey was chosen to be the gathering method because the data needed is quantitative. and it allows for fast and wide data gathering (Sekaran & Bougie, 2016). To make the data gathering as convenient as possible, self-administered online surveys are used.

### 3.4. Purpose of the study

The purpose of this quantitative study is to develop an understanding of what attributes have the biggest impact to the purchase intention of a potential customer. The results gained from the study will help the cruise operators in the Saimaa region to develop their cruises and marketing in a way that is the most appealing for the potential customer. Additionally, it is investigated whether past experience with cruises and identifying oneself as ecotourist affect the importance attached to certain attributes. This will further on help the cruise operators to segment their market accordingly.

### 3.5. Measurement items

To measure the impact of cruise attributes on the purchase decision, purchase intention scale (Table 1) was adopted from Singh et al. (2019). The measurement items of cruise attributes were originally derived from Whyte et al. (2018) (Tables 2 and 4) but were adapted to suit the context of Lake Saimaa (Tables 3 and 5). In the scale adoption process, local cruise entrepreneur was consulted to gain better understanding of possible attributes of a river cruise in the Saimaa region. In addition, two other sources, publication by Savonlinna Region Federation of Municipalities (2011) and [www.lakesaimaa.fi](http://www.lakesaimaa.fi) (n.d.), were reviewed to gain complete understanding of the context.

<b><i>Purchase intention</i></b>
<i>I would consider purchasing a cruise in the near future</i>
<i>I would try a cruise (e.g. take a tour on a ship when the ship onshore)</i>
<i>The probability of purchasing a cruise is high</i>

Table 1: Purchase intention

<b>Original onboard items</b>
<b>Onboard environment</b> <i>The ship's accommodation facilities are of high quality</i> <i>The ship has a variety of food and restaurants available onboard</i> <i>The ship's food and restaurants are of high quality</i> <i>The ship and its facilities are clean and in good appearance</i> <i>The ship provides a comfortable environment</i> <i>The ship will not feel overly crowded or busy</i> <i>The ship will have places available to enjoy your personal space</i> <i>The ship will provide a relaxing/ stress-relieving atmosphere</i> <i>The ship will provide a safe environment while onboard</i>
<b>Onboard recreation</b> <i>The ship has good onboard health &amp; fitness facilities and amenities (e.g. gym, spa, lap pools, sports facilities, etc.)</i> <i>The ship has good onboard entertainment facilities and amenities (e.g. casino, bars, night clubs, lounges, show rooms, etc.)</i> <i>The ship will provide an exciting atmosphere</i> <i>The ship has good swimming pools/ hot tubs</i>
<b>Onboard social interactions</b> <i>The ship provides opportunities to meet new people while onboard</i> <i>The cruise line/ ship is known for having friendly passengers</i> <i>The cruise line/ ship is known for having a diverse group of passengers (e.g. passengers of different ages, nationalities, places of residence, etc.)</i> <i>The ship will provide opportunities to socialize with other passengers</i>

Table 2: Original onboard items

## **Modified onboard items**

### **Onboard environment**

*The ship's **suites** are of high quality*

*The ship's food and restaurants are of high quality*

*The ship and its facilities are clean and in good appearance*

*The ship provides a comfortable environment*

*The ship will not feel overly crowded or busy*

*The ship will have places available to enjoy your personal space*

*The ship will provide a relaxing/ stress-relieving atmosphere*

*The ship will provide a safe environment while onboard*

*The ship has an authentic and close-to-nature feeling (e.g. hearing nature's voices in the suites, ceiling window etc.)*

*The ship provides individualized/custom-made services*

*The ship's service is superior and even the smallest wishes are taken into account*

~~*The ship has a variety of food and restaurants available onboard*~~

### **Onboard recreation**

*The ship has onboard health & relaxation facilities (e.g. **spa, sauna**, etc.)*

*The ship has onboard entertainment facilities (e.g. **bar/library** etc.)*

*The ship provides possibility of eating foods with ingredients collected by yourself (e.g. mushrooms, berries, fish etc.)*

*The ship has line of unique souvenirs to shop while on board (e.g. ship's own whiskey, ship's own jewelry etc.)*

~~*The ship will provide an exciting atmosphere*~~

~~*The ship has good swimming pools/hot tubs*~~

### **Onboard social interactions**

*The ship provides opportunities to meet new people **with similar interests***

*The cruise line/ ship is known for having a diverse group of passengers (e.g. passengers of different ages, nationalities, places of residence, etc.)*

*The ship will provide opportunities to socialize with other passengers*

~~*The cruise line/ ship is known for having friendly passengers*~~

### **Ship's eco-friendliness**

*The ship transforms waste into energy*

*The ship is completely carbon neutral*

*The ship purifies the water used from the lake*

*The ship has an eco-certificate*

Table 3: Modified onboard items

<p><b>Original onshore items</b></p> <p><b>Onshore activities</b></p> <p><i>The ports to be visited offer water-based activities (e.g. swimming, snorkeling, scuba-diving, surfing, fishing, water sports, etc.)</i></p> <p><i>The ports to be visited offer warm weather activities (e.g. going to the beach, sun bathing, etc.)</i></p> <p><i>The ports to be visited offer activities that are compatible with my interests (e.g. hiking, golf, tennis, horse riding, etc.)</i></p> <p><i>The ports to be visited have good bars or nightclubs onshore</i></p> <p><i>The ports to be visited offer music and performances while onshore</i></p> <p><i>The ports to be visited offer colder weather activities (e.g. glacier sightseeing, glacier trekking, winter sports, etc.)</i></p> <p><b>Learning and exploration</b></p> <p><i>The ship stops at multiple ports of call</i></p> <p><i>The ports to be visited are not all similar</i></p> <p><i>The ports to be visited are places you have never been before</i></p> <p><i>The ports to be visited have historical sites and attractions to visit</i></p> <p><i>The ports to be visited offer opportunities to learn about the local culture</i></p> <p><i>The ports to be visited offer opportunities to learn new things</i></p> <p><b>Visual surroundings</b></p> <p><i>The ports to be visited are likely to have good weather at the time of the cruise</i></p> <p><i>The ports to be visited offer beautiful scenery</i></p> <p><i>The ports to be visited offer varied or diverse scenery</i></p> <p><i>The ports to be visited have natural features (e.g. mountains, waterfalls, parks, forests, beaches, lakes, rivers, etc.)</i></p> <p><b>Safety and comfort</b></p> <p><i>The ports to be visited have well marked signage and finding locations is not difficult</i></p> <p><i>It is easy to get to/ from the cruise terminal at the start/ end of the cruise</i></p> <p><i>The ports to be visited have acceptable standards of hygiene and cleanliness</i></p> <p><b>Destination development</b></p> <p><i>The ports to be visited are well-known and popular places to visit</i></p> <p><i>The ports to be visited have well-known/ popular landmarks and attractions</i></p> <p><i>The ports to be visited are well developed (e.g. infrastructure, economy, government, environment, education, etc.)</i></p>
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Table 4: Original onshore items

## **Modified onshore items**

### **Onshore activities**

*The ports to be visited offer water-based activities (e.g. swimming, fishing, etc.)*

*The ports to be visited offer nature-based activities (e.g. berry picking, snow shoeing, nature trails etc.)<sup>1</sup>*

*The ports to be visited offer a possibility to see endangered Saimaa ringed seal in its natural habitat <sup>1</sup>*

*The ports to be visited offer traditional Finnish artisan experiences (e.g. visiting blacksmith, baking carnelian pies etc.)*

*The ports to be visited offer opportunities to connect you with the place (e.g. planting a tree to a forest, being a godparent to a saimaa ringed seal etc.)*

*The ports to be visited have well-known/ popular landmarks and attractions (moved from destination development)*

~~*The ports to be visited offer warm weather activities (e.g. going to the beach, sun bathing, etc.)*~~

~~*The ports to be visited offer activities that are compatible with my interests (e.g. hiking, golf, tennis, horse riding, etc.)*~~

~~*The ports to be visited have good bars or nightclubs onshore <sup>1</sup>*~~

~~*The ports to be visited offer music and performances while onshore <sup>1</sup>*~~

### **Learning and exploration**

*The ship stops at multiple ports of call*

*The ports to be visited are not all similar*

*The ports to be visited are places you have never been before*

*The ports to be visited have historical sites and attractions to visit*

*The ports to be visited offer opportunities to learn about the local culture*

*The ports to be visited offer opportunities to learn new things*

*The ports to be visited have a lot of historical stories to hear*

### **Visual surroundings**

*The ports to be visited offer beautiful scenery*

*The ports to be visited offer varied or diverse scenery*

*The ports to be visited have natural features (e.g. rocks, parks, forests, beaches, lakes, rivers, etc.)*

*The ports to be visited have extremely clean air and nature*

~~*The ports to be visited are likely to have good weather at the time of the cruise*~~

### **Safety and comfort**

*The ports to be visited have acceptable standards of hygiene and cleanliness*

*The ports to be visited have well marked signage and finding locations is not difficult*

*The ports to be visited feel safe at all times*

~~*It is easy to get to/ from the cruise terminal at the start/ end of the cruise*~~

### **Destination development**

~~*The ports to be visited are well known and popular places to visit*~~

~~*The ports to be visited have well known/ popular landmarks and attractions (moved to onshore activities)*~~

~~*The ports to be visited are well developed (e.g. infrastructure, economy, government, environment, education, etc.)*~~

Table 5: Modified onshore items

### **3.6. Questionnaire design**

The survey was created based on a cruise attribute destination scale developed by Whyte et al. (2018). The adoption of this scale allows for comparisons between the initial study and the responses gathered from this study. The factor groups of the scale remained mostly the same, but some of the items were changed to suit the context of luxury eco cruise on Lake Saimaa better instead of just generic cruise.

The full survey can be found from appendix 1. The survey started with an introduction disclosing the identity of the researcher and purpose of the research. In the introduction, the participants were noted about their right to withdraw their participation at any point. They were assured that the responses collected were completely anonymous and confidential.

The first page of the actual survey had a detailed description of a cruise in the Saimaa region followed by a promotional video to provide the respondents with better understanding of the context. The respondents were asked to keep in mind the description for the rest of the survey. After the description, the respondents were asked to rate the importance of 23 onboard and 22 onshore attributes using a seven-point Likert scale system, which is designed to examine how strongly respondents agree with certain statements (Sekaran & Bougie, 2016). The options ranged from “Not at all Important” to “Extremely Important”. Likert scales usually range from four-point scale to eleven-point scale, but in this occasion seven-point scale was used. Firstly, because by Whyte et al. (2018) also utilized it when introducing the cruise destination attributes scale, and secondly, because there is some evidence that it is more accurate measure of respondents’ true evaluation (Finstad, 2010; Joshi et al., 2015). To remind the respondents about the context, the page with statements about onboard attributes started with a picture of interior of luxury cruise ship while the page with statement about onshore attributes started with a picture of a Saimaa ringed seal swimming in Lake Saimaa. After the attribute questions, the respondents were asked three questions relating to their purchase intention of a cruise, also using a seven-point Likert scale. The purchase



intention scale was adopted from Singh et al. (2019). The options ranged from “Not at all Likely” to “Extremely Likely”.

The following section of survey included questions about the respondents’ cruising habits and asked whether they identified themselves as eco-tourists. Lastly, the demographic questions were asked. The placement of demographic questions was chosen to be the last one, because some respondents might feel those demographic questions somewhat personal and feel uncomfortable answering to them. Therefore, postponing the demographic questions until the end can make the respondents more willing to answer to them and not leaving the survey unfinished (Sekaran & Bougie, 2016).

To avoid survey fatigue, the survey was made as short and easy to answer as possible keeping in mind that all relevant information will be collected.

### **3.7. Sampling design and sample size**

Previous studies show that nationality does have an effect on the perceived importance of different cruise attributes. For example, Vianelli & Valta (2019) observed that Italians value social life over other attributes while for Germans the core elements such as food and cabin are extremely important. Therefore, to avoid any bias resulting from respondents’ nationality, the population is chosen to be only from one country. According to CLIA (2018), 45.9% of all the cruise passengers worldwide are from the United States. To get a representative study population of possible cruisers, United States was chosen to be the country of origin for all the respondents. In addition, a requirement of \$80,000 annual income was set to make sure that the respondents could afford cruising and realistically think what attributes would affect their decision to do so.

Because of the characteristics needed from the respondents, judgment sampling, type of purposive sampling, was used. It involves the choice of individuals that conform to the predetermined criteria, in this case to nationality and to income level (Sekaran & Bougie,

2016). It is a type of nonprobability sampling meaning that not all the elements in the population have equal probability of being chosen. Because of that, the results gained from the study cannot be confidently applied to the whole population (Sekaran & Bougie, 2016). However, judgment sampling is the only viable sampling method, because it is believed that only wealthy foreign persons can give accurate answers to what are the most important attributes affecting the purchase intention of a cruise in the Saimaa region.

### **3.8. Data collection method**

The survey was generated using an online survey tool called Zoho survey. Before launching the survey, a pilot study was conducted. The aim of the pilot study was to make sure that all the questions are easily understandable and that there are no spelling or placement mistakes in the final survey. Additionally, it was tested whether the survey was compatible with both computers and mobile devices. The survey was tested using other students from Aalto Mikkeli campus who had also designed questionnaires in the past. The survey was distributed to six other students, three were instructed to do it with their computers, other three with their mobile devices. Based on their feedback a few spelling mistakes were corrected and some improvement to the flow of the questionnaire on mobile devices were made.

Desired population would have been difficult to reach using traditional methods such as sharing the survey in the social media, especially with the time constraints in the data collection. Therefore, 140 responses were bought through Zoho survey's online survey panel. First, demographic requirements (over 18 years old, from the United States, and minimum annual income of 80,000\$) were given for Zoho survey. Next, Zoho survey looked for suitable respondents from their database. Finally, the respondents received a link to their email, and they were given a small compensation for answering the survey. The final data collection process lasted from 9<sup>th</sup> of March 2020 until 14<sup>th</sup> of March 2020.

## 4. FINDINGS

The following section presents the findings of the study. First, it will go through the respondent profile. Second, it will move into determining whether scale adoption process was successful with confirmatory factor analysis. Thirdly, reliability analysis is conducted. Lastly, all the hypotheses are tested. All the statistical analyses were conducted using SPSS Statistics, which is an online software package designed for analyzing data.

### 4.1. Respondent profile

The final qualified sample included 118 respondents. It consisted of 70 males and 48 females (Figure 1), all of them from the United States. Most of the respondents were between ages of 35 and 44 (48.3%) (Figure 2) with an average age of 40.25 (SD=12.21). The average age of cruise passengers in 2018 (CLIA, 2018) was 46.7, so the respondents average age is quite close to the actual population's average age.

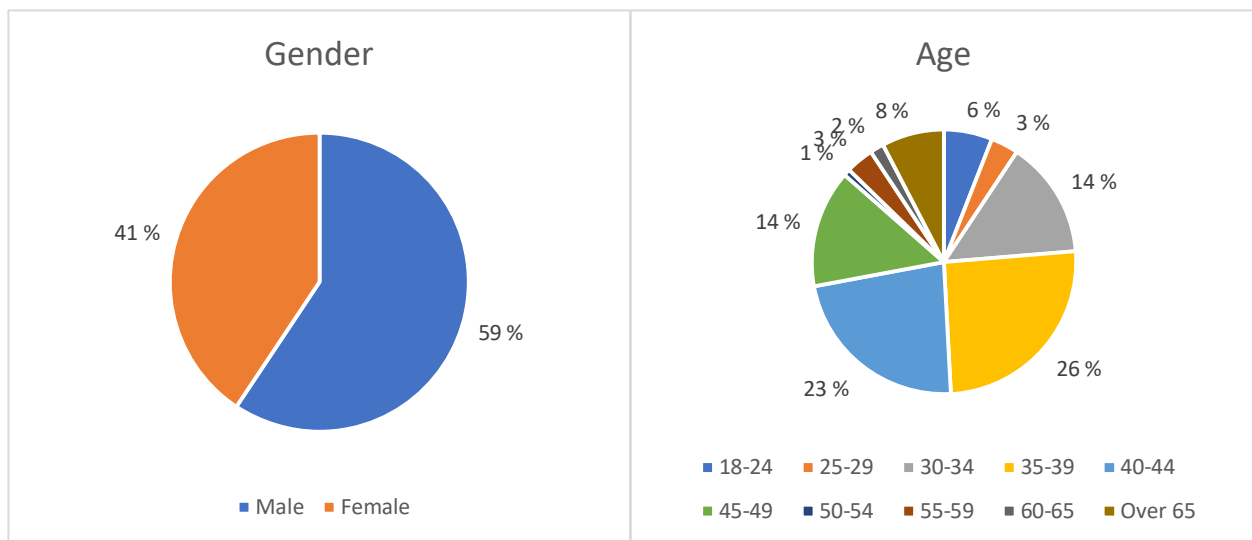


Figure 2: Respondents' gender

Figure 3: Respondents' age

The requirement for the respondent to take part in the survey was a minimum annual income of 75,000\$. Above that, income groups were distributed quite equally except under

the range of \$100,00-\$124,999 were 28.0% of the respondents (Figure 3). Majority of the respondents (86.4%) were married, which could be explained with relatively high mean age of the respondents (Figure 4).

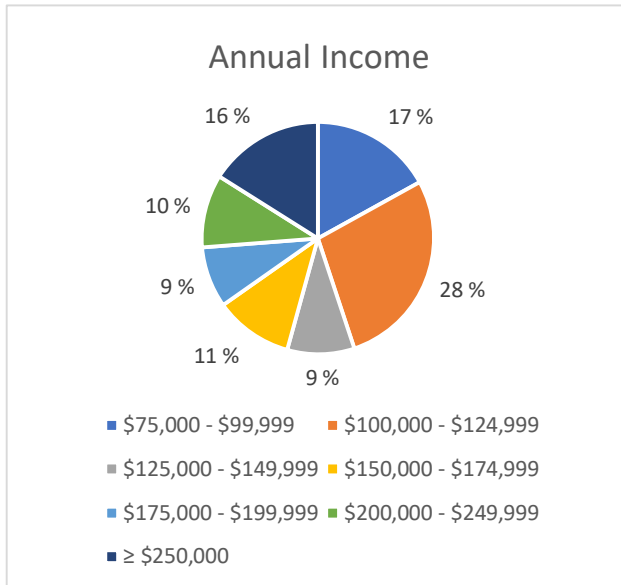


Figure 4: Respondents' annual income

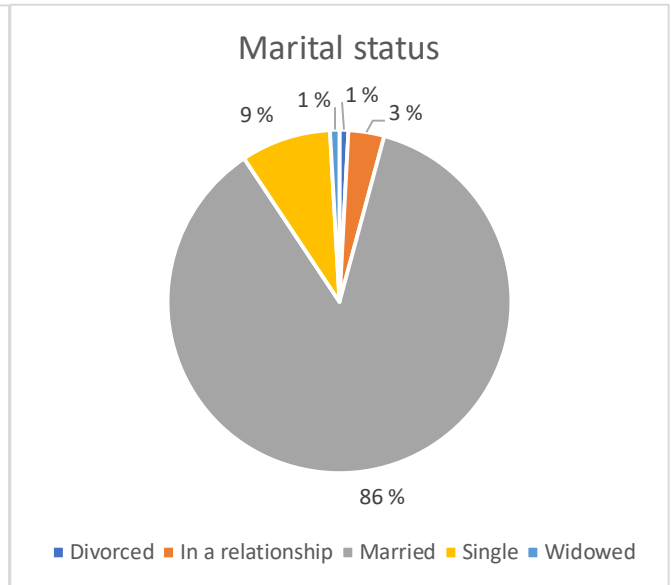


Figure 5: Respondents' marital status

Most of the respondents were full-time employed (78.0%), and the second biggest group was retirees (9.3%). Rest of the respondents were either students, part-time employees, self-employed or unemployed (Figure 5).

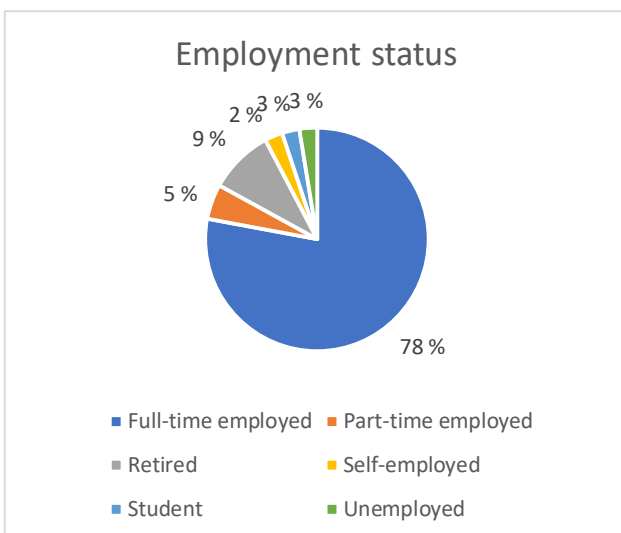


Figure 6: Respondent's employment status

Less than one third of the respondents (34) had not been on an overnight cruise before (Figure 6) while also less than two thirds of the respondents (37) stated that they did not identify themselves as ecotourists (Figure 7). Crosstabulation was conducted to see if these were same respondents, but only 19 answered no to both of the questions.

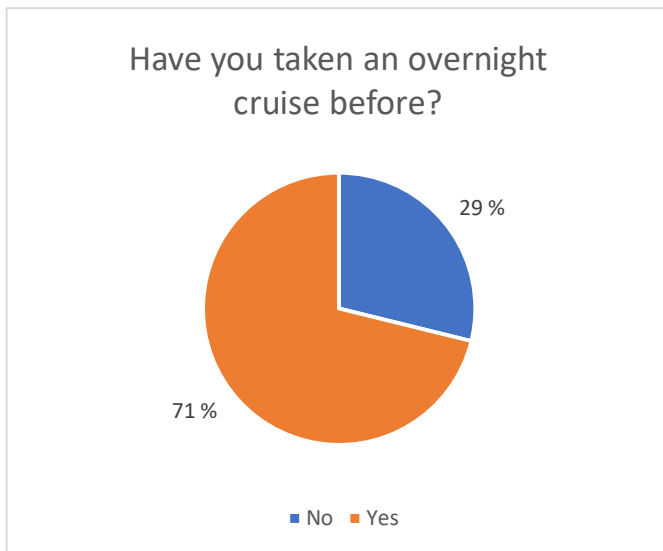


Figure 7: Respondents' experience with cruises

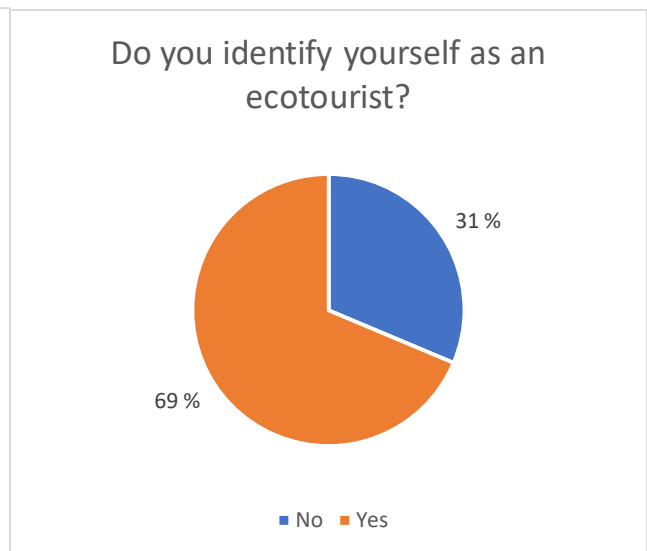


Figure 8: Respondents identifying themselves as ecotourists

## 4.2. Factor analysis

To test whether scale adoption process was successful, factor analysis was conducted. In the analysis, varimax (orthogonal) rotation was used. As deciding the number of factors to be retained, Kaiser criterion was used meaning that factors having eigenvalues greater than one are acceptable (Costello & Osborne, 2005) (Figure 9). Factor analysis identified three factor groups from onboard items. Loading of 0.500 is considered to be strongly loaded (Costello & Osborne, 2005) which was case for all the items, ranging from 0.507 to 0.829. There were some minor cross-loadings, but none that would have had loading over 0.500 in at least two of the categories. The factor groups of onboard social interaction and onboard recreation were combined, creating a new factor group called onboard socialization and entertainment. Ship's eco-friendliness and onboard environment stayed the same. Table 6 presents the results for onboard attributes.

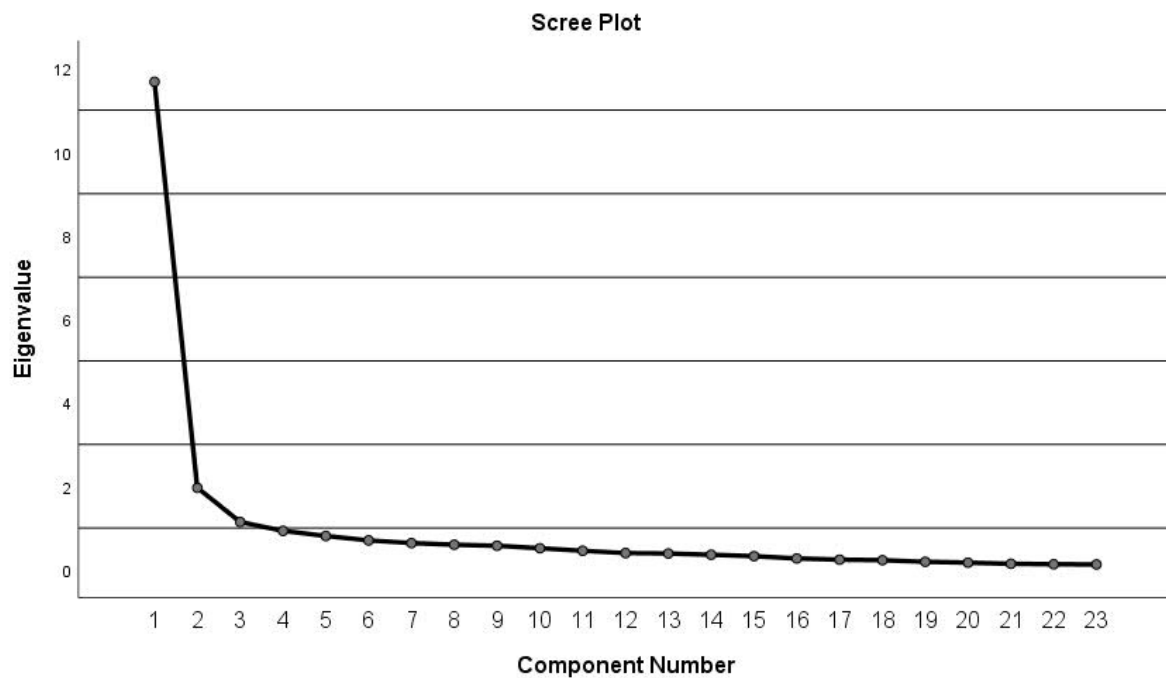


Figure 9: Scree plot of Eigenvalues for 23 factor groups, onboard attributes

Factors/Items	Factor Loading	Eigen-value	Mean	Std. Dev.	Alpha
<b>Factor 1: Onboard Environment</b>		11.678	<b>6.12</b>	0.853	<b>0.929</b>
The ship's service is superior and even the smallest wishes are taken into account	0.793		6.01	1.237	
The ship's suites are of high quality	0.755		6.14	1.169	
The ship provides a comfortable environment	0.754		6.30	0.998	
The ship's food and restaurants are of high quality	0.732		6.29	1.141	
The ship has modern facilities and interior	0.730		6.04	1.180	
The ship has an authentic and close-to-nature feeling (e.g. hearing nature's voices in the suites, ceiling window etc.)	0.718		5.96	1.270	
The ship will provide a relaxing/ stress-relieving atmosphere	0.704		6.18	1.137	
The ship and its facilities are clean and in good appearance	0.703		6.26	1.025	
The ship will provide a safe environment while onboard	0.690		6.24	1.091	
The ship will have places available to enjoy your personal space	0.673		6.25	0.942	
The ship will not feel overly crowded or busy	0.623		6.03	1.154	
The ship provides individualized/custom-made services	0.507		5.80	1.265	
<b>Factor 2: Onboard Socialization &amp; Entertainment</b>		1.962	<b>5.73</b>	1.133	<b>0.886</b>
The ship has line of unique souvenirs to shop while on board (e.g. ship's own whiskey, ship's own jewelry etc.)	0.829		5.51	1.454	
The ship provides possibility of eating foods with ingredients collected by yourself (e.g. mushrooms, berries, fish etc.)	0.726		5.85	1.344	

The cruise line/ ship is known for having a diverse group of passengers (e.g. passengers of different ages, nationalities, places of residence. etc.)	0.712		5.73	1.369	
The ship will provide opportunities to socialize with other passengers	0.684		5.77	1.264	
The ship has onboard health & relaxation facilities (e.g. spa, sauna, etc.)	0.604		5.83	1.322	
The ship provides opportunities to meet new people with similar interests	0.560		5.69	1.424	
The ship has onboard entertainment facilities (e.g. bar/library etc.)	0.508		5.97	1.339	
<b>Factor 3: Ship's Eco-friendliness</b>		1.145	<b>5.75</b>	1.084	<b>0.825</b>
The ship transforms waste into energy	0.700		5.72	1.389	
The ship is completely carbon neutral	0.677		5.77	1.270	
The ship purifies the water used from the lake	0.623		5.76	1.375	
The ship has an eco-certificate	0.600		5.73	1.318	

Table 6: Onboard attribute factor groups

Same analysis was conducted with onshore attributes. Factor analysis identified four factor groups from onshore items. All of the items loaded higher than 0.500, ranging from 0.509 to 0.837. CFA found factor groups, learning and exploration, visual surroundings, onshore activities and safety and cleanliness. The factor groups remained mostly the same, except that “the ports to be visited have natural features” from visual surroundings and “the ports to be visited offer traditional Finnish artisan experiences” and “the ports to be visited offer a possibility to see endangered Saimaa ringed seal in its natural habitat” from onshore activities were moved to learning and exploration. Due to heavy cross-loadings, two items “the ports to be visited have well marked signage and finding locations is not difficult” and “the ports offer a possibility to support local communities by buying souvenirs/eating in local restaurants” were deleted from further analysis. Table 7 presents the results for onshore items.

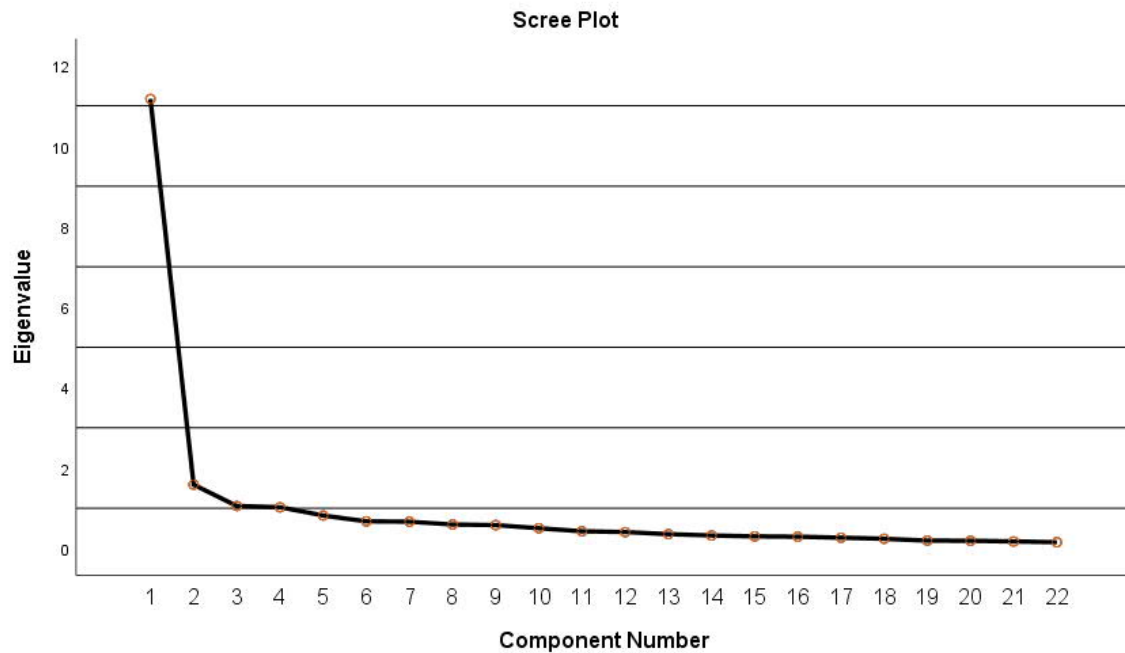


Figure 10: Scree plot of Eigenvalues for 22 factor groups, onshore attributes

Factors/Items	Factor Loading	Eigen-value	Mean	Std. Dev.	Alpha
<b>Factor 1: Learning and Exploration</b>		11.169	<b>5.91</b>	0.945	<b>0.924</b>
The ship stops at multiple ports of call	0.749		6.00	1.140	
The ports to be visited are not all similar	0.714		5.74	1.194	
The ports to be visited offer traditional Finnish artisan experiences (e.g. visiting blacksmith, baking carnelian pies etc.)	0.672		5.74	1.270	
The ports to be visited have historical sites and attractions to visit	0.628		5.97	1.154	
The ports to be visited have natural features (e.g. mountains, waterfalls, parks, forests, beaches, lakes, rivers, etc.)	0.605		6.07	1.107	
The ports to be visited have a lot of historical stories to hear	0.598		5.90	1.081	
The ports to be visited offer opportunities to learn new things	0.584		5.82	1.167	
The ports to be visited offer a possibility to see endangered Saimaa ringed seal in its natural habitat	0.579		5.86	1.256	
The ports to be visited are places you have never been before	0.531		5.86	1.360	
The ports to be visited offer opportunities to learn about the local culture	0.509		5.97	1.216	
<b>Factor 2: Visual Surroundings</b>		1.585	<b>6.07</b>	0.899	<b>0.853</b>
The ports to be visited offer beautiful scenery	0.761		6.08	1.171	
The ports to be visited have extremely clean air and nature	0.698		6.17	1.032	
The ports to be visited offer varied or diverse scenery	0.660		5.91	1.155	
<b>Factor 3: Onshore Activities</b>		1.055	<b>5.76</b>	0.998	<b>0.840</b>
The ports to be visited offer water-based activities (e.g. swimming, fishing, kayaking, ice skating etc.)	0.799		5.61	1.359	
The activities/excursions onshore have eco-certificates	0.751		5.75	1.294	



The ports to be visited offer nature-based activities (e.g. berry picking, snow shoeing, nature trails etc.)	0.726		5.71	1.390	
The ports to be visited have well-known/ popular landmarks and attractions	0.633		5.84	1.307	
The ports to be visited offer opportunities to connect you with the place (e.g. planting a tree to a forest, being a godparent to a Saimaa ringed seal etc.)	0.515		5.78	1.295	
<b>Factor 4: Safety and Cleanliness</b>		1.023	<b>6.03</b>	0.933	<b>0.815</b>
The ports to be visited have acceptable standards of hygiene and cleanliness	0.837		6.15	1.083	
The ports to be visited feel safe at all times	0.735		6.06	1.104	

Table 7: Onshore attribute factor groups.

### 4.3. Reliability analysis

Factor analysis conducted identified three factor groups under onboard attributes and four factor groups under onshore attributes. To further test the internal reliability of these factor groups, Cronbach's alpha was used. Table 1 shows the Cronbach's alpha for each individual construct.

Factor group	Cronbach's Alpha	Number of items
Ship's eco-friendliness	.825	4
Onboard socialization and entertainment	.886	7
Onboard environment	.929	12
Safety and comfort	.815	2
Visual surroundings	.853	3
Onshore activities	.840	5
Learning and exploration	.924	10

Table 8: Reliability statistics

As a general rule, constructs should score at least 0.7 to be acceptable (Tavakol & Dennick, 2011). As illustrated in the table 1, all the factor groups measured have higher than 0.7 Cronbach's Alpha. Therefore, all the constructs have enough internal validity to be used in further analysis.

#### 4.4. Hypothesis 1: The onboard attributes are rated to be more important than the onshore attributes

Table 6 summarizes the results from onboard attribute group while table 7 summarizes the results from onshore attribute group. Out of onboard attributes, onboard environment was rated to be clearly the most important one, followed by ship's eco-friendliness and onboard socialization and entertainment. Out of onshore attributes, visual surroundings was rated to be the most important, followed by safety and comfort, learning and exploration, and finally, onshore activities.

The ratings of onboard and onshore attributes were positively correlated ( $r = 0.881$ ,  $p < 0.000$ ). According to Taylor (1990), correlations with coefficient over 0.68 can be stated to be strongly correlated. Hence, the perceived importance of onboard attributes is strongly correlated with perceived importance of onshore attributes.

The average score of all the onboard attributes was 5.95 out of 7 while the average score of onshore attributes was 5.90 out of 7. To measure the relative importance of onboard and onshore attributes, paired samples t-test was conducted. However, there was not a significant difference between the means ( $t_{117} = 1.352$ ,  $p < 0.179$ ). Thus, H1 is not supported.

#### 4.5. Hypothesis 2: The onboard attributes have higher impact on purchase intention

Table 9 presents the average rating for purchase intention.

Purchase intention		5.77	1.418	0.928
I would consider purchasing a cruise in the near future	0.890	5.87	1.641	
I would try a cruise (e.g. take a tour on a ship when the ship onshore)	0.844	5.83	1.469	
The probability of purchasing a cruise is high	0.828	5.59	1.701	

Table 9: Purchase intention.

Multiple linear regression was calculated to see whether the perceived importance of onboard attributes and the perceived importance of onshore attributes predicts purchase intention. A significant regression equation was found ( $F(2,115) = 22.297, p < .000$ ), with an  $R^2$  of .273 meaning that this equation accounts for 27% of variance in purchase intention. Participants' predicted purchase intention is equal to  $0.578 + 0.308 (\text{ONBOARD}) + 0.573 (\text{ONSHORE})$ , where all the constructs are measured with 7-point Likert scale. Purchase intention increased with 0.308 for each valuation of onboard attributes and 0.573 for each valuation of onshore attributes. Perceived importance of onshore attributes was a significant predictor ( $p < .010$ ). Thus, H2 was not supported and contrary results were found.

**Coefficients<sup>a</sup>**

Model		Unstandardized Coefficients		Standardized Coefficients	t	Sig.
		B	Std. Error	Beta		
1	(Constant)	,578	,789		,732	,466
	Onboard	,308	,201	,202	1,530	,129
	Onshore	,573	,218	,346	2,624	,010

a. Dependent Variable: Purchase intention

Figure 11: Multiple regression statistics

Second multiple regression was calculated to test whether the individual factor groups under onboard and onshore attributes would predict purchase intention more closely. A significant regression equation was found ( $F(7,110) = 12.378, p < .000$ ), with an  $R^2$  of .432 meaning that this equation accounts for 43% of variance in purchase intention. All the constructs are measured with 7-point Likert scale.

**Coefficients<sup>a</sup>**

Model		Unstandardized Coefficients		Standardized Coefficients	t	Sig.
		B	Std. Error	Beta		
1	(Constant)	1,118	,760		1,471	,144
	Ship's eco-friendliness	,199	,147	,157	1,358	,177
	Onboard environment	-,246	,218	-,163	-1,125	,263
	Onboard socialization and entertainment	,301	,169	,236	1,784	,077
	<b>Onshore activities</b>	<b>,642</b>	<b>,164</b>	<b>,476</b>	<b>3,920</b>	<b>,000</b>
	Learning and exploration	-,036	,234	-,024	-,155	,877
	Visual surroundings	-,024	,241	-,015	-,098	,922
	Safety and cleanliness	-,006	,143	-,004	-,045	,965

a. Dependent Variable: Purchase intention

Figure 12: Multiple regression statistics

Figure 12 shows that onshore activities is the only factor group having significant contribution to the purchase intention equation with  $p < .000$ . Other six factor groups did not have a statistically significant effect.

#### 4.6. Hypothesis 3: Past experience with cruises affects the perceived importance of certain attributes.

To measure H3, two independent samples t-tests was conducted. First one comparing the past experience with the main attribute groupings, onboard and onshore attributes, and the second one comparing past experience with all the other attribute groups. Figure 13 presents the mean perceived importance of different attribute groups by cruisers and potential cruisers.

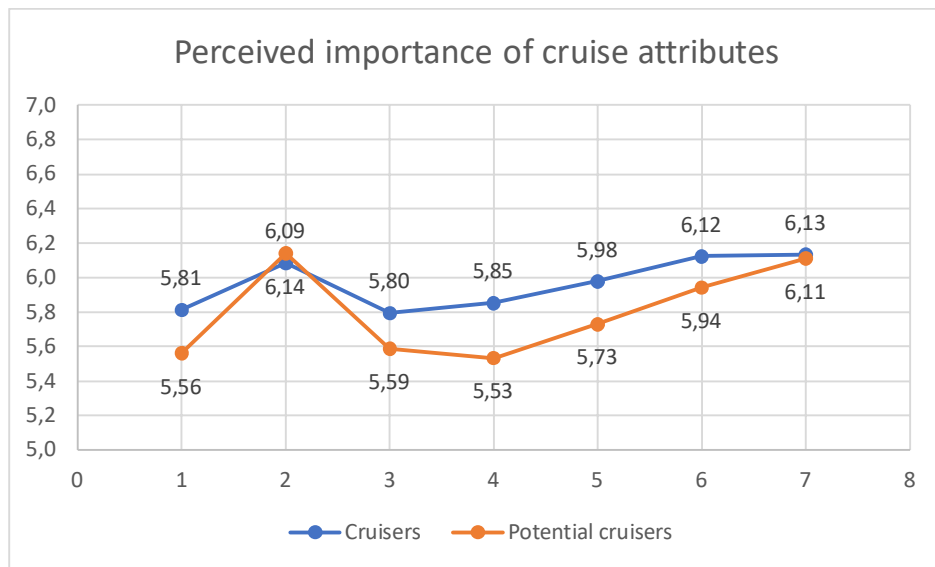


Figure 13: Perceived importance of cruise attributes, cruisers versus potential cruisers. 1 = *Ship's eco-friendliness*, 2 = *Onboard environment*, 3 = *Onboard socialization and entertainment*, 4 = *Onshore activities*, 5 = *Learning and exploration*, 6 = *Visual surroundings*, 7 = *Safety and cleanliness*

The findings show that there is a clear trend that cruisers valued the attributes to be more important than potential cruisers. For potential cruisers, the mean importance attached to onboard attributes was 5.87 (SD=1.16, N=34) while to onshore attributes it was 5.75 (SD=1.10, N=34). Although there is a trend that the onboard attributes would be rated to be more important, there results were not statistically significant. For cruisers, the mean importance attached to onboard attributes was 5.95 (SD=0.81, N=84) while to onshore attributes it was slightly higher, 5.98 (SD=0.71, N=84). Standard deviation was consistently smaller with people who had taken overnight cruises before implying smaller variance in the respondents' answers. Independent samples t-test was conducted to see whether the differences between the means of cruisers and potential cruisers were significant but the results did not show that. Thus, H3 was not supported.

To explore further whether past experience with cruises affected the purchase intention of cruise holiday, independent samples t-test was conducted comparing whether one had been on a cruise before with purchase intention. Mean purchase intention for potential cruisers was 5.43 (SD=2.01) while for the cruisers it was 5.97 (SD=1.04). The findings

were statistically significant with  $p < .050$  suggesting that people who have cruised before are also more likely to purchase cruise holiday again.

#### **4.7. Hypothesis 4: Being ecotourist affects the perceived importance of certain attributes.**

To measure H4, two independent samples t-tests was conducted. First one comparing being ecotourist with the main attribute groupings, onboard and onshore attributes, and the second one comparing being ecotourist with all the other attribute groups. Figure 14 presents the mean perceived importance of different attribute groups by cruisers and potential cruisers.

The findings show that there is a clear trend that people who identified themselves as ecotourist consistently valued all the attribute groups to be more important than people who did not consider themselves as ecotourists. In addition, standard deviation was consistently smaller with ecotourists implying smaller variance in the respondents' answers. For non-ecotourists, the mean importance attached to onboard attributes was 5.68 (SD=1.11, N=37) while to onshore attributes it was 5.67 (SD=1.10, N=37). For ecotourists, the mean importance attached to onboard attributes was 6.04 (SD=0.81, N=81) while to onshore attributes it was slightly higher, 6.02 (SD=0.70, N=81). The differences between the mean importance attached to attributes was significant in both onshore and onboard attributes. Onboard attributes were rated to be on average 0.37 more important by ecotourists ( $t_{116} = -1.991$ ,  $p < .001$ ) while onshore attributes were rated to be on average 0.35 higher by ecotourists.

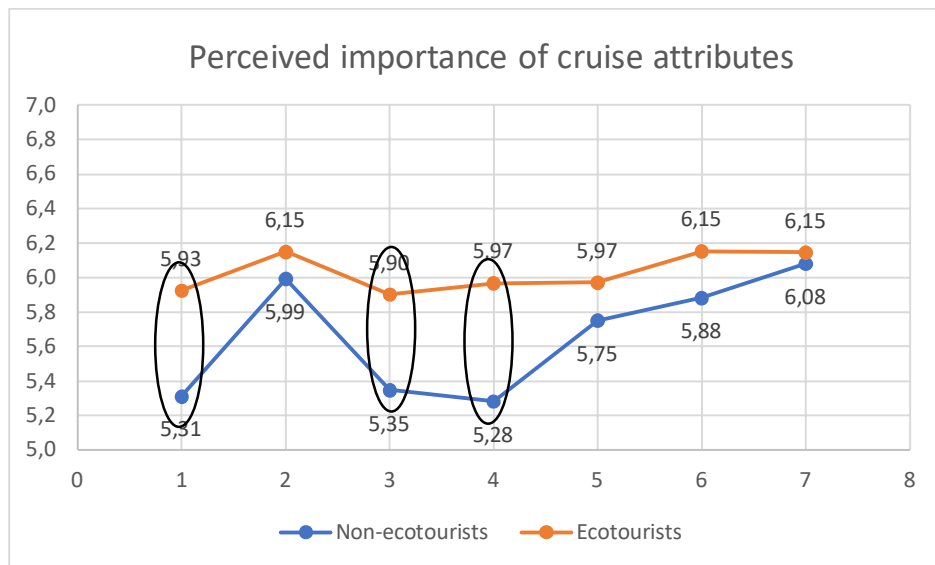


Figure 14: Perceived importance of cruise attributes, ecotourists versus non-ecotourists. 1 = Ship's eco-friendliness, 2 = Onboard environment, 3 = Onboard socialization and entertainment, 4 = Onshore activities, 5 = Learning and exploration, 6 = Visual surroundings, 7 = Safety and cleanliness

When the individual attribute groups were addressed, the differences between the means were significant in three cases, circled in the figure 14. Firstly, onshore activities ( $t_{116} = -3.490$ ,  $p < .001$ ) was rated on average to be 0.69 more important by ecotourists than non-ecotourists. Secondly, ship's eco-friendliness ( $t_{116} = -2.895$ ,  $p < .005$ ) was rated on average to be 0.62 be more important by ecotourist. Thirdly, onboard socialization and entertainment ( $t_{116} = -2.618$ ,  $p < .010$ ) was rated on average to be 0.56 more important by ecotourists. Thus, H4 is supported.

To explore further whether identifying oneself as ecotourist affected the purchase intention of cruise holiday, independent samples t-test was conducted comparing ecotourists versus non-ecotourists with purchase intention. Mean purchase intention for non-ecotourists was 5.00 while for the ecotourists it was 6.13. The findings were statistically significant with  $p < .000$  suggesting that ecotourists are more likely to purchase cruise holiday.

## **5. DISCUSSION AND ANALYSIS**

Prior to conducting primary research for this thesis, past literature was reviewed to explore what cruise attributes could be perceived to be the most important in consumers' perspective when choosing which cruise to take. Due to the findings in the literature review, it was also considered to be important to study how the respondents' past cruising experience, and whether they identified themselves as ecotourists affected their perceived importance of cruise attributes. Based on the findings from the literature review, four hypotheses were formed.

The attributes studied were grouped to onboard and onshore attributes. In both categories, four subcategories were included. Under onboard attributes, the subcategories studied were onboard environment, onboard recreation, onboard social interactions and ship's eco-friendliness. Under onshore attributes, the subcategories studied included visual surroundings, onshore activities, learning and exploration, and safety and comfort. The measurement used the cruise destination attribute scale developed by Whyte et al. (2018) as a basis, but the measured items were modified to fit the context of a river cruise in the Saimaa region. After testing whether scale adoption process was successful with confirmatory factor analysis, onboard recreation and onboard social interactions were combined as one new group, onboard socialization, and entertainment.

The first hypothesis assumed that the onboard attributes of a cruise would be perceived to be more important than the onshore attributes of a cruise. Followed by that hypothesis, the second hypothesis was formed expanding the findings stating that onboard attributes would have a more significant impact in predicting consumers' purchase intention. Past literature has mostly studied destination attributes and cruise ship attributes separately. Some studies have included ports as an attribute group, but even then, the ports have been regarded just as a minor subcategory. This was only the second study treating the onboard and onshore attributes as equals in consumers' decision-making and not just as



a minor part of the cruise. The first study was conducted by Whyte et al. (2018) studying the topic in the context of ocean cruises. Their findings propose that onboard attributes would be more important for consumers, supporting the current trend of cruises marketing themselves as a primary destination. This thesis studied the topic in the context of river cruises, and the results of this study challenge the previous findings to some extent. Although there was a trend showing that onboard attributes would be valued to be slightly more important than the onshore attributes, the difference was not statistically significant.

When the relationship with the perceived importance of onboard and onshore attributes and purchase intention was studied, a strong positive correlation was found suggesting that people who rate the onboard attributes to be important also rate the onshore attributes to be important. Subsequently, multiple regression analysis showed that people giving more importance to the attributes, in general, had also higher purchase intentions. The findings are in alignment with the information integration theory introduced by Anderson (1971) which proposes that purchase intention is a function of the perceived importance and evaluation of the product attributes. Unexpectedly, the analysis showed that onshore attributes contributed significantly more than did the onboard attributes to purchase intention. Although this discovery is exactly the contrary compared to the initial hypothesis, the results can be explained with the context of the study. Like Jones et al. (2016) stated, river cruises depend more on their itineraries and attractions offered by the ports of call because they simply do not have the capability of offering all the onboard features that ocean cruises have. The respondents were asked to keep in mind the description and video about a river cruise in the Saimaa region throughout the survey, also when the purchase intention was asked. Therefore, it can be assumed that the respondents had in mind a river cruise when all the questions were asked and, thus, gave more importance to the onshore attributes.

The ranking of the attribute groups conformed quite well to the findings from the literature review. The most important onboard attribute group was the onboard environment. The literature review indicated that superior service could be perceived to be important in a luxurious context (Griffin et al., 1997), but the two service-related items were among the

four lowest-rated onboard environment attributes. The two other attribute groups were rated considerably lower as suspected in the literature review. Out of the onshore attributes, visual surroundings and safety and cleanliness were rated to be the most important, just as predicted in the earlier. Learning and exploration was ranked to be quite important as well which could be explained through unique excursions offered such as seeing Saimaa ringed seal. Onshore activities were rated to be the least important.

The third hypothesis was formed to investigate how previous cruising experience affects the perceived importance of some attributes. Past literature has been consistently suggesting that being more familiar with a product category results in different judgments of what is perceived to be an important attribute of a product and what is not (Park, 1976; Hu & Ritchie, 1993; Baloglu, 1998; Coupey et al., 1998; Xie et al. 2012). Additionally, it has been suggested that people who are unfamiliar with the product category tend to weigh the importance of the attributes more equally (Park, 1976; Coupey et al., 1998; Xie et al. 2012). However, the findings from this study seem to suggest quite the opposite.

The respondents who had cruised before valued the importance of cruise attributes more equally. For potential cruisers, the perceived importance of factor groups varied from 5.56 to 6.14, while for the cruisers the perceived importance varied only from 5.80 to 6.09. According to information integration theory (Anderson, 1971), the more unimportant the attributes are rated to be, the lower the purchase intention. The results from this study demonstrate the same, potential cruisers attached less importance to the cruise attributes and their purchase intention was significantly lower than for cruisers. De la Viña & Ford (2012) had similar findings when they concluded that if a consumer had been on a cruise before they were more likely to do that again.

The results from this study show that the onshore attributes were perceived to be slightly more important than the onboard attributes by cruisers with previous experience while the contrary was true for potential cruisers who considered the onboard attributes, especially onboard environment, to be more important. De la Viña & Ford (2012) observed that the new destinations were more important for cruisers than for potential cruisers which could

in part explain the results. Since cruisers have already undergone the general cruising vacation, perhaps they are looking for some different experiences from their upcoming cruises. This could also explain why the onboard environment was deemed to be extremely important by potential cruisers. Since they have not yet had the initial cruising experience, they want to focus on the core aspects of the cruise before broadening their cruise experiences sought.

The last hypothesis was formed to explore whether being an ecotourist affects the perceived importance of some cruise attributes. Because the Saimaa region is an ecotourism destination, it was thought to be an important factor to consider. Past literature is lacking studies about ecotourists' motivation, so the literature review was quite limited on the subject. Principles of ecotourism include closeness to nature, preserving nature, local cultures and learning and exploration throughout the trip (Ceballos-Lascuráin, 2002; Buckley, 2009). Based on the principles, it could be assumed that ecotourists have some other inner motivations to participate in the trip than simply just enjoying themselves, for example, learning new things during their trip.

The results from this study support the assumption that ecotourists are looking for different experiences from their cruise holiday compared to non-ecotourists. First of all, ecotourists rated onshore attributes to be more important. The onshore activity attributes in the survey were very region-specific, involved unique experiences, and most of the activities utilized nature in one way or another. All the onshore activity items correspond to the principles of ecotourism which could explain why ecotourists rate the attribute group to be so important. The original cruise destination attribute scale included also entertainment under onshore activities, but those items were deliberately left out since the ports of call in the Saimaa region cannot offer those services. If those would have been included, the results could have been quite different. Secondly, the ship's eco-friendliness was rated to be a lot more important by ecotourists. Since the ship's eco-friendliness is very tightly connected to preserving nature, it is a clear reason why ecotourists rated it to be more important. Finally, also onboard social interactions and onboard recreation were rated to be more important by ecotourists. Altogether, these findings are in alignment with Ritchie

(1993) and Tam (2012) who observed that the importance attached to attributes varied within the context of vacation experience sought.

Surprisingly, learning and exploration was not rated significantly more important by ecotourists, even though it is one of the principles of ecotourism. There was, however, a trend showing that it would be more valued by ecotourists. Andriotis & Agiomirgianakis (2010) stated that the interest in learning new things about the destination's history and nature is highly dependent on the destination itself which in this case could explain the results gained. In case someone from the United States decides to come all the way to Finland for a cruise, they are quite committed to it. Traveling so far, it could be assumed that the cruise passengers would want to get everything out of the holiday.

Purchase intention for non-ecotourists was considerably lower than for ecotourists which is somewhat surprising considering all the criticism the cruise industry has received relating to sustainability (Klein, 2011; Jones et al. 2016). After all, ecotourism should promote conserving nature and not the contrary. This finding could be explained by the measurement items used. They gave the impression that the cruise is very sustainable and environmentally friendly

## **6. CONCLUSIONS**

This chapter presents the main conclusion of the study. Firstly, the main findings are summarized. Secondly, the implications of the findings from the study are discussed. Thirdly, limitations of the research are addressed. Lastly, suggestions for further research are done based on the findings from the study.

### **6.1. Main findings**

The findings of the study show that purchase intention is positively correlated with perceived importance of cruise attributes. Based on findings from literature review, it was initially hypothesized that onboard attributes are more important for the consumers in their decision-making and that they would have higher impact on consumers' purchase intention. Yet, the results showed contrary. The onboard and the onshore attributes were rated to be almost equally important. In addition, the findings show that onshore attributes had a higher impact to the purchase intention of cruise holiday. These results deviate from the common standpoint that onboard attributes would be more important when consumers are making their decision to cruise. However, most of the academic research in the past has focused on ocean cruises while this study was conducted in the context of river cruises. As Jones et al. (2016) stated, sightseeing and land-based excursions are important elements of river cruises which explains why in this study onshore attributes were given more importance than what previous studies have suggested.

In addition, the results demonstrate how the perceived importance of cruise attributes can vary notably with different consumer characteristics. Cruisers continuously rated all the attributes to be more important than potential cruisers, with the exception of onboard environment. Same trend is illustrated with ecotourists and non-ecotourists when the ecotourists rated all the attributes to be more important.

## **6.2. Implications for international business**

The findings from the research can be used to gain detailed insights of what are the most important river cruise attributes from the consumers' point of view. The findings highlight the necessity for cruise operators to understand the characteristics of their target market and further on how crucial it is to segment markets for effective promotion. Vianelli and Valta (2019) has already showed that instead of trying to explicitly determine which attributes are the most important, it might be more useful to segment the customers based on their preferences. In case a cruise operator is able to differentiate their products so that there is something for everyone, through segmenting they are able to gain bigger share of market. These findings are a helpful starting point when planning for marketing and positioning strategies for different segments.

More concretely, the findings from this study confirms that the area of Lake Saimaa could and should be marketed as an ecotourism destination. People identifying themselves as ecotourists had considerably higher purchase intention of a cruise holiday. In addition, non-ecotourists rated the onshore activities to be the least important factor although those are one of the comparative advantages the region holds. Thus, the results imply that targeted marketing for ecotourists would be more viable strategy than just general promotion of the area.

This thesis indicates that the results can vary quite drastically depending on the context of the study, whether the study has focused on ocean cruises or to river cruises. It is important for the cruise operators to acknowledge this in case they are planning to utilize results and suggestions from previous studies.

## **6.3. Limitations of the study**

This study faces several limitations. It was not able to produce many statistically significant findings and there are a few potential reasons behind this.

First of all, to receive explicit answer to whether respondents consider the onboard or onshore attributes to be more important, slider question asking this directly should have been added. This question would have also allowed second way of testing hypotheses one and two, which could have provided either supportive or contradicting findings. Furthermore, the sample size was relatively small (N=118) and increasing its size could have provided more meaningful differences in attributions.

Secondly, all the responses were bought using survey panels. The motivations to answer the survey can be questioned since all the respondents received a financial reward from responding the survey. Although past research has not identified that offering incentives in online surveys would decrease the quality of survey responses (Göritz, 2004; Teisel et al., 2005), the varying measurements of survey quality can create different conclusions. In a more recent study, Hess & Stathopoulos (2013) linked response quality to survey engagement. One of the indicators of survey engagement was response time used. In this survey, there was a video lasting for three minutes that the respondents were required to watch. However, there were several survey responses in which the total time taken to respond was three minutes or less. Thus, it can be deducted that the respondents did not watch the whole video. Furthermore it can be questioned whether the respondents did actually think their responses before answering. In case the respondents would not have been offered monetary incentive, perhaps other motivations, such as willingness to help or interest in the survey topic, would have been the main driving motivator. However, due to the restricted time limits of gathering and analyzing data, this was the only way to acquire enough responses.

Finally, the study was conducted during the time when coronavirus was labelled as pandemic by World Health Organization (WHO). Coronavirus has had a huge impact on everyone's life when countries are locking themselves down. One of the industries suffering a lot is cruise industry. People cannot travel anymore and some detected coronavirus cases on ships has forced cruisers to be in quarantine in their cabins for 14 days. Additionally, some of the cruise ships are sailing in limbo when all countries are

denying them to port. It can be questioned whether the outbreak has caused people to value cruises and their attributes differently compared to normal times.

#### **6.4. Suggestions for future research**

This was the first study conducted exploring the effect of cruise attributes to consumers' purchase intention, therefore, leaving a lot research points to the future. The study did not find too many significant relationships, but the limitations of the study discussed earlier can be main reasons behind this. This study could be replicated after trying to eliminate most of the limitations.

The sample consisted of only respondents from the United States. Based on previous research, it is assumed that nationality does have an effect on perceived importance of the cruise attributes (Chen et al., 2016; Vianelli & Valta, 2019). Therefore, further research should be conducted to see whether nationality does affect the relative importance of onboard and onshore attributes. In addition, this study modified the scale to use in the context of river cruises in the Saimaa region, and applying the cruise destination attribute scale to other types of cruises, such as expedition cruises to Alaska, could significantly influence the results.

This study did not consider price as one of the cruise attributes, and a follow up study could include that as well. Past research has revealed that price is an important factor in deciding which cruise to choose, especially if they are close to each other (Duman, 2002).

Further research should focus on understanding the travel motivations of cruise tourists to travel to an ecotourism destination such as Saimaa region. The study could be expanded into segmenting river cruise passengers based on their vacation experience sought.



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## APPENDICES

### Appendix 1: Online survey

#### Cruise attributes

Dear Respondent,

I am a student from the Aalto University, Mikkeli campus, Finland. This is a survey part of my bachelor's thesis. The survey aims to measure the importance of onboard and onshore attributes in the purchase intention of luxury cruises. The survey should not take more than 10 minutes to complete.

To respond to this questionnaire you must be at least 18 years old. All responses are entirely anonymous and confidential. There are no potential risks in participating in this research. Your participation in this study is completely voluntary. You may withdraw from this study at any time. If you have any questions, concerns or complaints, please contact me at [neea.santama@aalto.fi](mailto:neea.santama@aalto.fi). Please, indicate in the box below that you have read and understood all of the above and consent to participate in this study.

1. I have read and understood the text above \*

☐ Yes

Imagine taking a cruise that includes all the following aspects:

- Lasts for 7 days
- Luxury steamship with 30 suites
- Going through Saimaa's lake labyrinth, stops at 3 different ports
- Carbon neutral cruise
- See 6000-year-old rock paintings, visit St. Olof's Castle, visit forest museum, visit a national park, visit a monastery, see endangered saimaa ringed seal in its natural environment
- Includes all the meals

Please watch the following video to see a visualization about the cruise. Keep in mind the context when answering all the following questions.

2. When choosing which cruise you will take, how important to you are each of the following onboard aspects?

1 = Not at all important, 7= Extremely important \*



	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
The ship will provide a relaxing/ stress-relieving atmosphere *	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
The ship and its facilities are clean and in good appearance *	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
The ship will not feel overly crowded or busy *	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
The ship has line of unique souvenirs to shop while on board (e.g. ship's own whiskey, ship's own jewelry etc.) *	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
The cruise line/ ship is known for having a diverse group of passengers (e.g. passengers of different ages, nationalities, places of residence, etc.) *	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
The ship's service is superior and even the smallest wishes are taken into account *	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>

	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
The ship will have places available to enjoy your personal space *	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
The ship provides possibility of eating foods with ingredients collected by yourself (e.g. mushrooms, berries, fish etc.) *	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
The ship's suites are of high quality *	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
The ship has onboard health & relaxation facilities (e.g. spa, sauna, etc.) *	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
The ship provides a comfortable environment *	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
The ship provides opportunities to meet new people with similar interests *	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
The ship provides individualized/custom-made services *	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
The ship purifies the water used from the lake *	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
The ship has onboard entertainment facilities (e.g. bar/library etc.) *	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
The ship is completely carbon neutral *	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
The ship transforms waste into energy *	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
The ship has an eco-certificate *	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
The ship will provide opportunities to socialize with other passengers *	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
The ship's food and restaurants are of high quality *	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
The ship will provide a safe environment while <u>onboard</u> *	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
The ship has an authentic and close-to-nature feeling (e.g. hearing nature's voices in the suites, ceiling window etc.) *	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
The ship has modern facilities and <u>interior</u> *	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Other, please specify <input type="text"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>

3. When choosing which cruise you will take, how important to you are each of the following onshore aspects?

1 = Not at all important; 7 = Extremely important \*



	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
The ports to be visited offer water-based activities (e.g. swimming, fishing, kayaking, ice skating etc.) *	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
The ports to be visited have extremely clean air and nature *	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
The ports to be visited are not all similar *	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
The ports to be visited are places you have never been before *	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
The ports to be visited offer beautiful scenery *	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
The ship stops at multiple ports of call *	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
The ports to be visited have well-known/popular landmarks and attractions *	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
The ports to be visited have a lot of historical stories to hear *	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
The ports to be visited offer nature-based activities (e.g. berry picking, snow shoeing, nature trails etc.) *	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>



The ports to be visited offer a possibility to see endangered Saimaa ringed seal in its natural habitat *	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
The ports to be visited have natural features (e.g. mountains, waterfalls, parks, forests, beaches, lakes, rivers, etc.) *	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
The ports to be visited offer varied or diverse scenery *	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
The ports to be visited offer traditional Finnish artisan experiences (e.g. visiting blacksmith, baking carnelian pies etc.) *	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
The ports offer a possibility to support local communities by buying souvenirs/eating in local restaurants *	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
The ports to be visited have well marked signage and finding locations is not difficult *	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
The ports to be visited have acceptable standards of hygiene and cleanliness *	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
The ports to be visited feel safe at all times *	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
The ports to be visited have historical sites and attractions to visit *	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
The ports to be visited offer opportunities to learn new things *	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
The ports to be visited offer opportunities to connect you with the place (e.g. planting a tree to a forest, being a godparent to a Saimaa ringed seal etc.) *	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
The ports to be visited offer opportunities to learn about the local culture *	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
The activities/excursions onshore have eco-certificates *	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Other, please specify <input type="text"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>

4. How much would you be willing to pay for a cruise like that per person? In US dollars

5. How much do you agree with the following statements.

1 = Strongly disagree, 7 = Strongly agree \*

	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
I would consider purchasing a cruise in the near future *	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
I would try a cruise (e.g. take a tour on a ship when the ship onshore) *	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
The probability of purchasing a cruise is high *	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>

6. Do you identify yourself as ecotourist? \*

- ☐ Yes  
☐ No

7. Have you taken overnight cruise ever before? \*

- ☐ Yes  
☐ No

13. Are you planning to take overnight cruise in the next 12 months? \*

- ☐ Yes  
☐ No

14. Would you like to receive more information about luxury cruises in Saimaa region? \*

- ☐ Yes  
☐ No



**16. How would you like to receive more information about luxury cruises in Saimaa region? \***

- ☐ Via email
- ☐ Via social media
- ☐ Via brochures
- ☐ Via travel fairs
- ☐ Via travel agents
- ☐ Via phone calls
- ☐ Other, what?
- ☐ None of these ways

---

**17. What is your gender?**

- ☐ Male
- ☐ Female
- ☐ Other
- ☐ I'd rather not say

**18. How old are you? \***

- ☐ 18-24
- ☐ 25-29
- ☐ 30-34
- ☐ 35-39
- ☐ 40-44
- ☐ 45-49
- ☐ 55-59
- ☐ 60-64
- ☐ 65 or over

**19. What is your current primary occupation status? \***

- ☐ Full-time employed
- ☐ Part-time employed
- ☐ Unemployed
- ☐ Student
- ☐ Self-employed

**20. What is your marital status?**

- ☐ Married
- ☐ Single
- ☐ In a relationship
- ☐ Rather not specify

**21. What is your current annual income? \***

- ☐ Less than 25,000\$
- ☐ 25,001\$ to 50,000\$
- ☐ 50,001\$ to 75,000\$
- ☐ 75,001\$ to 100,000\$
- ☐ 100,001\$ to 150,000\$
- ☐ More than 150,000\$
- ☐ I'd rather not say